DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 151 869 CS 502 003

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TITLE Eloquence in a Technological Society.
PUB DATE Mar 78
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Communication Association (Boston, Massachusetts, March 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication (Thought Transfer); Composition (Literary); Credibility; Higher Education; *Persuasive Discourse; *Rhetoric; *Rhetorical Criticism; Science Curriculum; *Technology; *Verbal Communication
IDENTIFIERS *Eloquence

ABSTRACT

Some current scientific-engineering curricula consider the rhetorical expression of ideas as separable and inessential to course content; rhetoric is defined as a distinct set of technical skills practiced by specialists. In contrast, the classical definition of rhetoric subordinates the method or technique of expression to the refinement of the native human capacity for persuasive speech. Every person is responsible for expressing thoughts and ideas persuasively, and eloquence is a virtue that cannot be detached from individuals without fundamental change to them. Rhetoric is essential to science because all research involves communication. A model science curriculum requires clear and precise written and oral discourse in each subject that is offered. (HAI)

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ELOQUENCE IN A TECHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Since classical times, rhetoricians have had a strong interest in pedagogy. Quintilian, for example, was interested primarily in how an orator should be educated and only incidentally in the theory of persuasion. Ramistic rhetoric was a by-product of curricular reform at the University of Paris. And in modern times, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca point out that much of what we call education can be regarded as epideictic rhetoric--the communical celebration of tradition.

The questions I want to address here bear on the relationship between rhetoric and education in two ways, one echoing the concern of Quintilian, the other in line with the insight of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca. First, I will try to sketch the place of writing and speaking--the exercise of rhetorical art--in the education of modern scientists and engineers. Second, I will be considering the pedagogy of modern science and engineering as epideictic rhetoric that celebrates--and thus perpetuates--the ethos of a technological society. I will argue that in the scientific-engineering curriculum rhetorical art is treated as a set of technical skills practiced by specialists, and that this implicit rhetorical theory is unfortunate for two reasons: it encourages mystification of the public through the pretense of expertness, and second, it is at odds with current thinking about the nature of both rhetoric and science. Finally, and in the Ramistic tradition of curricular reform, I will propose that the place of writing and speaking in the scientific-engineering curriculum should be reconceived on the assumption that rhetorical art is simply the refinement of a native human ability. The starting point for the change is a revival of the classical concept of eloquence, understood as an

intellectual virtue.

(I must add here a disclaimer. What I have to say about "the scientific-engineering curriculum" has to do with the curriculum as I have come to understand it in ten years at a school that gives primary emphasis to science and engineering. I have not investigated curricula at other schools, but I have no reason to suspect that the one I am familiar with is in any important way atypical. In any event, the most wide-ranging and thorough investigation of catalogues and course syllabi would reveal only partly what I am interested in. The curriculum I am concerned with includes attitudes toward their own and other disciplines held by teachers and communicated by them in subtle ways to their students. At the same time, I believe that much of what I have to say about the scientific-engineering curriculum holds equally of curricula in other disciplines at other sorts of universities. An academic curriculum is both reflection and reinforcement of the ethos of a culture. To the degree that ours is a technological society, the scientific-engineering curriculum becomes an ideal type for all curricula.)

The most obvious and important feature of rhetoric in the scientific-engineering curriculum is that it is placed in the exclusive custody of one or two departments, and thus becomes a specialty (or two specialties--speaking and writing). The ability to write and/or speak effectively is thus portrayed as an accomplishment reserved to specialists in English and speech, just as the ability to comprehend and manipulate the economic marketplace is reserved to economists. Students may be required to take a course or to demonstrate some minimal proficiency as rhetors, but they understand that there are higher levels of proficiency available only to those who specialize in speech or English. Rhetorical art having been designated a specialty,

specialists in the other disciplines refrain from practicing or commenting upon it. Relatively few teachers in scientific or engineering disciplines give assignments requiring the preparation of formal discourse, written or spoken. Those who do assign papers or oral presentations generally avoid commenting on students' rhetorical performance, usually by making a sharp distinction between "content" and "form", and grading entirely on the basis of the former. Professors who do take an interest in their students' rhetorical performance will sometimes try to enlist a teacher or graduate student in English or speech--a qualified expert--to comment on that aspect of assignments. More often, I suspect, they grumble about how badly their students write or speak, but continue to give passing grades to students they consider illiterate.

As a corollary of its status as a specialty, rhetorical art is generally regarded as inessential for the scientist or engineer. Once the sharp distinction between content and form in discourse has been made, it is an easy, almost unavoidable step to conclude that what matters for the scientist or engineer is content. Form, style, rhetoric or whatever the other half of the dichotomy is called becomes secondary, however desireable. The view of rhetorical art as a laudable but inessential accomplishment for the scientist or engineer is in fact acknowledged if not encouraged by many teachers and textbooks in technical communication. The introductory chapter of one widely used text, for example, is titled "A Selling Job," and it begins thus: "We may as well face the fact: if you are a typical undergraduate, you probably regard the writing of reports as a dull and superfluous chore."[1] The authors assume--correctly, no doubt--that students must be persuaded that writing is important to them as apprentice scientists and engineers. Compare this with mathematics. No one would think it necessary to begin a mathematics text for

engineers with "A Selling Job;" no engineering teacher would make a sharp distinction between content and calculation, and grade his students without considering the appropriateness and accuracy of their calculations.

A second important aspect of rhetorical art as treated in the scientific-engineering curriculum is emphasis on technical skills. Since writing and speaking effectively are assumed to be specialized activities, it is further assumed that the specialists must command advanced skills. When administrators become dissatisfied with the quality of rhetorical performance by students, they don't say simply that the students must write and speak better or more effectively, but rather that the students need better writing skills and speaking skills. The popular press, too, decries the decline in communication skills among students. The assumption seems to be that writing and speaking are in essence mechanical activities, reducible to sets of discrete motions learned in sequence, much as one learns to type by the touch system. Inept writing, it would seem, should be corrigable in much the same way that a golfer is taught to correct a bad slice--by identifying and mending the defective motions.

Rhetoric, then, has in the ethos of technology become a set of specialized skills practiced by a trained professional elite. It is, in a word, a technology. The understanding of writing and speaking as technology has gained currency among teachers of English and speech, as well as among our colleagues in science and engineering. The most recent issue of College Composition and Communication, for example, offers "Suggestions for a Commonsense Reform of the English Curriculum" based on the assumption that the fundamental task of the English teacher is training people to read and write.[2] Note well: training, not educating. The author has this to say about the preparation of graduate students in English:

> First of all, they themselves should be able to write well. Thus, they need advanced training in rhetoric and stylistics and theories of language and writing. More than that, they should have considerable training in writing itself, both critical and imaginative. In fact, I would be willing to make the writing of English prose one of the tool skills, substituting it for one of the foreign languages we now require.[3]

Note the assumption that knowledge of theories will make one a better writer, and the further assumption that writing competently is a "tool skill," comparable to the ability to translate from a foreign language into English. Another article in the same journal, this one dealing specifically with technical writing, offers further evidence of the technologizing of rhetoric. The author is concerned with techniques of information sorting in expository and prose, and at one point he comments thus on an illustrative passage from a technical pamphlet: "This seemingly simple text turns out upon closer inspection to be the work of a highly trained writer."[4] Again, we see the assumption that to be a competent writer it is not sufficient merely to be an imaginative and educated human being; one must command specialized skills. Rhetoric is no longer the common property of educated people; it has been placed in the domain of the specialist.

The Marxist critic Stanley Aronowitz associates the reduction of rhetorical art to a technology with the inability of students to critique intelligently the social reality they live in.[5] The connection as he sees it is essentially negative. Instruction in writing should be conjoined with analysis of culture, and should thus become an adventure in critical thought; reduction of the composition course to training in skills eliminates critical thought from the classroom and permits students to continue in their socially mystified state. I

believe that a further, more positive connection can be drawn between the two, that the technologizing of rhetoric contributes actively to mystification of the public. The notion that writing and speaking are technological invites the manufacture of techniques, and the invitation has not gone unaccepted. Anyone familiar with texts in technical communication or with discourse composed according to their dictates knows how highly formalized scientific rhetoric has become. The modern research proposal, for example, may be the most intricately stylized rhetorical genre yet devised. Whole books have been written on how to prepare one. The typical modern university employs a number of "grantsmen" whose principal function is to assist faculty members and administrators in dealing with the complex rhetoric of external funding. I have heard of consultants who ask--and get--fees reaching into five figures for writing just one proposal. For people uninitiated in their complexities, the form and style of technical discourse are both authoritative and uncommunicative. The discourse derives authority from the ethos of technology; at the same time, by intimidating the public with its complexity, it reinforces the ethos of technology. Used in reference to matters of public policy, the discourse of technology commands docility from its audience, implying that the experts will handle things properly. My favorite illustration in brief is a phrase Richard Nixon often used in reference to foreign policy: "building a structure of peace." It suggests an architect of international affairs equipped with intricate formulas and precision instruments, an expert legitimized by the ethos of technology, whose judgments are thus not subject to public debate. Henry Kissinger, brief case bulging with esoterica, was the incarnation of the peace technocrat.

I am reminded here of a brief scene from a television comedy. A young man assumes a fatherly demeanor as he reads an essay his younger brother has written for school. "What are all these little words I see--'a,' 'the,' 'and.' Lets see some nice big words, like 'unanimity' and 'predisposition.'" His sister breaks in angrily, "Of all the unmitigated hypocrisy ...," and the young man interrupts with enthusiasm, "Yeah, those are good words too!" The laugh track tells us its a joke. But beneath the somewhat tired humor is a serious comment about contemporary attitudes toward language. The young man knows rhetoric as technology, so he assumes the essay should be a virtuoso performance; standing outside the technological elite, he does not expect to understand what it means. Rhetoric, he believes, should be dazzling technique. He is asking to be mystified by the pretense of expertness. His expectation will not likely go unfulfilled.

Without attempting to trace its history, I would say that the understanding of rhetoric as a technology has two important bases. First, the curricular reforms undertaken by Ramus in the sixteenth-century radicalized the distinction between form and content in discourse, limiting rhetoric to considerations of form, understood as pure stylistic option. Second, scientists and philosophers of the early modern period came to see knowledge as the apprehension of self-evident, objective facts. In these two developments, knowledge and the communication of knowledge were pulled apart from both directions, much farther than had ever previously been done. The ancient rivalry between rhetoric and philosophy, which for centuries had been a lively and productive dialectic, was settled by establishing each as an independent, self-sufficient field of activity. The scientist or philosopher could pursue knowledge in solitude, and the rhetorician could spin out elegantly formed discourse without considering its content.

At the level of theory, I think it is clear that this view cannot be supported today. On the side of philosophy of science, the dominant view seems to be that scientific knowledge is essentially communal, the imaginative invention of groups of scientists working and arguing with each other. On the side of rhetorical theory, "form" is no longer understood as verbal shape devoid of "content," but is understood to be significant. A rhetorical form is the outward manifestation of a form of knowledge or consciousness.[6] Some theorists have made explicit the connection between these emergent views of rhetoric and philosophy of science, and have begun developing the idea of a rhetoric of science. A key point from this perspective is that communication among scientists is coordinate with research in the pursuit of scientific knowledge.[7]

These ideas invite one to heady realms of speculation about the nature of science, knowledge, and discourse, but my purpose in mentioning them is to make what I take to be a very practical point. The technologizing of rhetoric in the scientific-engineering curriculum in addition to encouraging mystification of the public through pretended expertness, is at odds with current thinking about the nature of science and rhetoric. If science is rhetorical, if scientific knowledge is essentially communal and communication among scientists is coordinate with research in the pursuit of knowledge, then the understanding of rhetoric as a set of specialized skills incidental to the practice of science becomes inadequate. Under these assumptions the ability to compose effective scientific discourse becomes a necessary qualification for full membership in the scientific community. A rhetorical incompetent could no more be a fully competent scientist than a mathematical incompetent could be.

It is pertinent to note here that at a certain level of scientific education the centrality of composing formal discourse becomes implicit, if not explicit, in the curriculum. Graduate students, and occasionally advanced undergraduates,

work together with their teachers on composing journal articles, proposals, and oral reports. They become apprentice rhetors as well as apprentice researchers, and the integral relationship of research and communication in science becomes more or less apparent in the form of their tuition. But for most students the lesson comes late, if at all. The typical recipient of a BS in science or engineering has in the college curriculum been taught to think of rhetorical art as specialized technique, separable from scientific substance, subject to judgment by technically qualified experts. Insofar as it conveys this view, the scientific-engineering curriculum wants changing.

The curriculum I envision would offer no identifiable course in writing or speaking, quite simply because all courses would be courses in writing and speaking. The rhetorical forms appropriate to a discipline would be essential subject matter for courses in that discipline. Students would write papers and make oral presentations in all, or at least the great majority of their courses. Professors would expect students to compose clear and precise, perhaps even elegant discourse, as well as to get the facts and numbers right.

I don't think this curriculum will come into being soon. Before it could come into being, we--all the professors--would have to be able to tell the difference between clear, precise, elegant discourse and its opposite, and judging from what appears in the professional journals we can't do that yet and aren't making very rapid progress toward being able to. In the meanwhile, we could do worse than consult the Greeks, who are supposed to have invented rhetoric. Their understanding of rhetorical art, I believe, makes more sense and is more in keeping with a contemporary view of science than is the understanding of rhetoric as technology. Consider for example, this passage from Isocrates:

> We ought....to think of the art of discourse just as we think of the other arts, and not to form opposite judgments about similar things, nor show ourselves intolerant toward that power which, of all the faculties which belong to the nature of man, is the source of most of our blessings. For in the other powers which we possess....we are in no respect superior to other living creatures; nay, we are inferior to many in swiftness and in strength and in other resources; but, because there has been implanted in us the power to persuade each other and to make clear to each other whatever we desire, not only have we escaped the life of wild beasts, but we have come together and founded cities and made laws and invented arts; and, generally speaking, there is no institution devised by man which the power of speech has not helped us to establish.... The power to speak well is taken as the surest index of a sound understanding, and discourse which is true and lawful and just is the outward image of a good and faithful soul. With this faculty we both contend against others on matters which are open to dispute and seek light for ourselves on things which are unknown; for the same arguments which we use in persuading others when we speak in public, we employ also when we deliberate in our own thoughts; and, while we call eloquent those who are able to speak before a crowd, we regard as sage those who most skillfully debate their problems in their own minds.[8]

What I want to emphasize in this passage is the idea that persuasive speech or effective discourse is a native human power that figures importantly in all human endeavors. Rhetorical art was conceived by the ancients as the

refinement of one's native capacity for persuasive speech, not a specialized set of skills to be mastered by a trained elite. The perfection of this human capacity for persuasive speech was called eloquence. The achievement of some degree of eloquence was in antiquity considered a proper educational goal for all people. Eloquence, in other words, was regarded as an intellectual virtue, and eloquent speech was the manifestation of a perfected human capacity, a virtuous nature, Quintilian's "good man." An audience schooled to regard eloquence as in intellectual virtue would not likely be mystified by the pretense of expertness, because they would expect to hear a perfected version of their own native capacity for persuasive speech.

Emphasis on the concept of eloquence did not preclude instruction in what we would call skills or techniques, but rather provided a perspective on technique that seems to have been lost. Aristotle could recognize rhetoric and dialectic alike as "within the realm of common knowledge," yet insist on "the feasibility of reducing the processes to a method."[9] Cicero and Quintilian both understood eloquent speech as the expression of a virtuous nature, yet they analyzed argumentative and stylistic techniques minutely. But for them and other classical rhetoricians, method or technique was always subordinate to the native human capacity for persuasive speech, and the development of rhetorical skills was simply a means to perfecting that capacity and achieving eloquence. They understood that the mastery of technique would not necessarily produce eloquence, and that one can be eloquent without mastering technique. In a rhetoric understood as technology, by contrast, technique is both necessary and sufficient for an adequate performance.

Because they understood eloquent speech as the expression of a virtuous nature, classical rhetoricians emphasized in their pedagogy specific instances of rhetorical performance more than abstract principles or descriptions of

technique. Students read and analyzed the recognized masters of oratory, and they learned technique by composing passages in imitation of the masters. The importance of models in the pedagogy of classical rhetoric might be compared on the one hand to the role of research exemplars--what Kuhn calls paradigms--in the scientist's apprenticeship, and on the other to the place of hagiography in the Christian pedagogy of moral virtue. One learns to be a scientific researcher by doing model experiments, imitating work long since done in order to gain "tacit knowledge" of the skills and techniques involved. In the Christian era, one learned moral virtue by studying and imitating the lives of saints who had themselves achieved some measure of virtue. In classical times one achieved eloquence by studying and imitating the speeches of great orators. In each case the fundamental limitations of abstractly described method--of technology--are recognized. In each case technique is embodied, is acted out as the expression of a living person.

A technology is an extension of man. As such, it is separable, inessential. Take away my tool box or my bicycle and I remain pretty much what I am. Some would argue--persuasively, I think--that an advanced technology tends to separate so radically from its makers that it becomes automonous and begins to define its own ends. Rhetorical art conceived as technology does just that. Speech and writing are separated from speakers and writers in such a way that we lose the sense of identity in and responsibility for our words. In the jargon of rhetorical theory, ethos or character is reduced to "source credibility," a technique for engineering consent. In the end what gets engineered may be the purposes of speakers and writers as well as their audiences. I think a case could be made, for example, that Richard Nixon was subverted by his own rhetoric, or rather the rhetoric that owned him.

A virtue, by contrast, is an essential attribute, as the etymology of the word suggests. It can't be detached from a person without changing him fundamentally. Take away the humility of St. Francis and he becomes someone else altogether. The ideal of eloquence, similarly, implies that a person is in a fundamental way what he says and writes. It would oblige people to take responsibility for their words and restore the connection between ethos and ethics.

NOTES

1. Joseph N. Ulman, Jr. and Jay R. Gould, Technical Reporting (New York: Hold, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972), 3.

2. John C. Gerber, "Suggestions for a Commonsense Reform of the English Curriculum. "College Composition and Communication 28 (Dec. 1977), 321-16.

3. Ibid., 315.

4. Robert DeBeaugrande, "Information and Grammar in Technical Writing," College Composition and Communication 28 (Dec. 1977), 329.

5. Stanley Aronowitz, "Mass Culture and the Eclipse of Reason: the Implications for Pedagogy," College English 38 (April 1977), 768-74.

6. The classic statement of this position is Kenneth Burke, Counter-Statement (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968). The most recent is Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (eds.) Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action (Washington: Speech Communication Association, forthcoming); see especially the introductory essay by Campbell and Jamieson, and Edwin Black, "The Sentimental Style as Escapism, or the Devil with Dan'l Webster."

7. See expecially Michael A. Overington, "The Scientific Community as Audience: Toward a Rhetorical Analysis of Science," Philosophy and Rhetoric 10 (Summer 1977), 154.

8. Isocrates, Antidosis, excerpt in Thomas W. Benson and Michael H. Prosser (eds.), Readings in Classical Rhetoric (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 47-8.

9. Lane Cooper (ed. and trans.), The Rhetoric of Aristotle (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1960), 1.